

Washington, DC – *Today, Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) issued the following statement on the occasion of Vietnam's President Nguyen Minh Triet's visit to Washington, D.C.*

Today, President Nguyen Minh Triet of Vietnam will be meeting with President Bush – the first Vietnamese state visit to the United States since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. I join other Members of Congress in a letter sent yesterday to President Bush, urging him to reinforce the universal ideals of human dignity, freedom and democracy by requesting that President Triet take immediate action for human rights reform and unconditionally releasing all non-violent political dissidents.

The United States, in good faith, granted Vietnam permanent normal trade relations with the assurances that Vietnam was improving and would continue to improve its human rights records. Vietnam expressed its desire to create stronger, bilateral relations with the United States. However, despite these assurances, Vietnam has significantly increased the level of its detention, harassment, and oppression of political activists in the past several months since its accession into the World Trade Organization. They have blatantly disregarded their own claims that they will be actively engaged in promoting and protecting human rights with the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In supporting House Resolution 243 and House Resolution 447, my thoughts were with Father Nguyen Van Ly, a well-known peaceful political dissident, who was shown in an alarming video being physically silenced by Vietnamese guards at his anti-propaganda trial. The literal image of free speech being smothered has been broadcasted to the world, and the United States cannot stand quietly by. The list of those dissidents being harassed, threatened, and detained continues to grow. While Vietnam has released two dissidents prior to the President Triet's visit, we cannot forget that there still remain other Vietnamese citizens, men and women, who remained imprisoned and harassed for advocating freedom and democracy.

I urge the Department of State to adopt the re-designation of Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern for its continued oppression of religious freedom and political expression, as recommended by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. It is my hope that the Vietnamese government will consider how their actions are viewed by the world, and that they immediately cease their detention and harassment of peaceful, democratic activists.